661 pitilessly everything that had been created as a labor of love during the NEP. New people were needed, and Prishchepov was classed as an enemy of the people, a wrecker, middleman, protector of the kulaks, and a promulgator of the private homesteads and small villages which were so harmful to the socialist forms of agriculture. In official documents and propaganda his work was contemptuously called the "prishchepovshchina." However, the besmirched activities of Prishchepov the People's Commissar of Agriculture, left a happy and lasting memory among the Belorussian peasantry.

The death of the academician, Professor Ignatovskii, and the arrest of D. Prishchepov were not isolated instances. Almost simultaneously a large group of culturally and economically prominent figures were arrested, among them the very popular philologist and academician Ia. Lesik, the renowned Belorussian geographer and economist, Academician Smolich, the Secretary of the Belorussian Academy of Sciences, Academician V. Lastovskii, Picheta, who was rector of the University, and others.

665 625 There were changes in the attitude and approach of the G. P. U. This organization received a standing order which was not to be changed for the arrest of Party members. As late as 1930, the G. P. U. had quite openly not meddled in the internal affairs of the Communist Party as the Party itself held court over its unsubmissive members and administered punishment. It had its own controlling and punitive organs in the Central Control Commission which had its plenipotentiaries throughout the republics and oblasts. . . . /22/

Anton Balitskii and the "Odessa" Group (1)

1. For information on the "Odessites" see the article by A. Sakovich, "Belorussi v Odesse" /"Belorussians in Odessa" Beda, /Misery/ No. 5 (10), May, 1952.

661 The People's Commissar of Public Education of the B. S. S. R., Anton Balitskii, was also a victim of the G. P. U. Until 1928 he was a deputy in the Narkomat, but even then he actually directed all its activities. Professor V. Ignatovskii had many other responsibilities besides the Narkomat of Public Education. He devoted a lot of attention to the Institute of Belorussian Culture and gave lectures at the University and in the Agricultural Institute; literary and scientific work also took up a lot of his time. He had written several studies of

661 been appointed Deputy President of the Sovnarkom of the B. S. S. R.

563 I consider it necessary to remark on the absurdity of some statements to the effect that the N. K. V. D. discriminated in favor of the Jews in making its arrests. Such statements are untrue and tainted with anti-Semitism. If the interested party were concerned with establishing the truth, he could find out from documents that all People's Commissars of the B. S. S. R., regardless of how proletarian their extraction, were arrested. The Commissar of the Communal Economy of the B. S. S. R., Wasserman, can serve as an example. During the Ezhovshchina he was arrested together with some others, and in prison went out of his mind. His wife was also arrested. The only one to escape arrest was the Deputy Commissar of the Food Industry, Evsei Paksin, and this was just an accident. The high ranking Jewish Party leaders did not escape either.

• 625 What went on in the rayons was unspeakably horrible. The
661 most primitive accomodations for thousands of people were hastily
[697] knocked together. In the city of Rogachevo prisoners were confined in the wintertime in a ruined old castle without stoves, doors or windows. The ruins were surrounded with barbed wire and by a guard. People died; an epidemic of typhus broke out, and the N. K. V. D. had to stop using the prison.

The inhabitants of the rayons adjacent to Poland were in excessively difficult straits as the N. K. V. D. border guard held sway there. Whole villages were emptied of their population. Everyone about whose reliability there was the slightest suspicion or who might have been suspected of being dissatisfied with the Soviet regime, was arrested. It can be stated without exaggeration that a good half of the male population suffered from the persecution. A 'troika's' had jurisdiction over the arrested, and the sentence was final and not subject to appeal. At night the condemed were carted away in trucks to be shot somewhere in the woods. /64/

As to the number of victims of the 1936-1937 terror we can judge by the following indices. Before the war Minsk had a population of about 250,000, and at the height of the Ezhovshchina from four to five hundred were arrested in a night. At twelve o'clock when the "normal work" of the N. K. V. D. usually began, fear seized the city's population. People could not sleep but waited nervously for the knock and the rustling. There was panic

7 Dur[illegible] the political purges 1936-1939 - Ann[illegible]

625 in the apartments at the sound of an automobile in the street. Every
661 family expected the dreaded visitors. Often in one family several persons were arrested. Fellow-workers in the various institutions, coming to work in the morning, looked around uneasily to determine the number of victims of the previous night. A person had to make superhuman efforts to maintain his outward calm and self-control at his work. He had to appear indifferent to the arrests of his close friends or people sharing his views. It was dangerous to show any interest in the prisoners or to ask about the fate of their families. The nerves of some who were still at liberty could not stand the strain. They did not lie down and go to sleep but got dressed and wandered aimlessly through the deserted streets of the city until morning. There was nothing to justify this behavior, but in the street one somehow felt more composed, and it was better than to wait for death in your own apartment. A person comforted himself with the fact that he would usually learn somewhat earlier if any fatal blow was being prepared for him. Many tried to be *sent* to distant, and if possible isolated, places. Anyone who could, tried to go to another oblast', another kray, far from any settled regions. There were cases of voluntary requests to be transferred to work in the Arctic Circle, Yakutiya, or the polar regions, of persons who signed contracts to work there -- in the hope of being saved from arrest. However these measures seldom were of any avail. Foresighted people would prepare a small parcel with laundry and some necessary articles in case they were to be arrested. The terror was heightened by rumors of the nightmarish conditions under which the prisoners were kept, tortures during the examinations, forced confessions. The prison cells were filled to overflowing; prisoners slept in shifts, all lying on one side so as to take up less room that way, and after a certain time; at a command, all turning over to lie on the other side.

697 Before being deposited in the cell, prisoners[4] were sub-
661 jected to the most minute search; all watches, glasses, aids, bandages which sick people might have, and shoe laces were taken away; buttons were cut off trousers, jackets, overcoats, and buckles were taken off shoes. Particular care was taken to make sure that the prisoners did not keep anything metallic. Being deprived of glasses and bandages was, for those who were sick, a cause not only of discomfort /65/ but of pain. The former provincial and district prisons were altered during the Ezhovshchina.

[4] [Political prisoners of the 1936-1937 purge - Ed.]

661 his throat with a razor but was saved from dying. Possibly it was just this which saved him from arrest. Others who were not arrested were Z. Biadulia and the budding writers, Brovko and Glebko. /67/

After the Ezhovshchina

625 661 After the Ezhovshchina accounts were settled with those whose function it had been to execute the will of the organizers of the terror. However, this took place within the walls of the N. D. V. D. In Vitebsk a certain Grechkin who had been arrested and subsequently set free was summoned to the (N. K. V. D.) court to serve as a witness in a case involving the inadmissibility of torture during examination. The investigator had knocked out several of Grechkin's teeth and was found guilty, but Grechkin was compelled to sign a statement that he would not divulge any information about what had transpired. The document, I Accuse the Kremlin of the Genocide of My Nation, by Nikolai Abramchik, published in 1950 in Toronto, Canada, in English, will provide sufficient testimony to the deeds of the N. K. V. D. in Belorussia during the Ezhovshchina.

665 661 The secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee, Volkov, was recalled from Belorussia after the Ezhovshchina and sent off to work in Mordovskaia oblast'. What became of him subsequently is not known, but the Belorussians will not forget this black figure who himself played such a very vital part in the slaughter ot tens of thousands of people. His cruelty was exceptional. P. Ponomarenko, who formerly had been a political agent in the Red Army in the Far East, was appointed first secretary. A new direction could be sensed in the Party's work, and this was particularly noticeable where the national movement was concerned. Formerly, national characteristics had been taken into account in various elections, appointments, and recruitments, but after the arrival of Ponomarenko the national problem ceased to exist officially. The whole group of the former leaders had been destroyed.[1] 661 643 Natalevich -- a man little known to the Belorussian masses, lacking in authority and initiative, and obedient to the will of the secretary of the Central Committee -- settled down into the presidency of the Supreme Soviet of the B. S. S. R. To the post of Secretary of the Supreme Soviet -- who in fact was the deputy president -- a completely unknown worker from around Mogilev 661 was appointed. A young doctor named Kiselev, who was totally

1 [During the 1936-1937 political purge - Analyst]

only in Minsk but even in Moscow, and they also got to Moscow by way of western Ukraine. They were considered very useful since they did not consume a lot of scarce gasoline. 177 557

As a matter of fact Soviet people could not understand the national antagonisms existing in former Poland. In Soviet Belorussia marriages between Belorussians and Jews were a common occurrence, but there, in western Belorussia, it was considered almost impossible and in any case an occurrence quite out of the ordinary. Some Soviet people were also surprised by the extreme subservience of the local population, particularly the peasantry, before government representatives and city people in general. This was the result of the training given by the Polish regime. Nonetheless a very short period of Soviet rule was sufficient to disappoint the population[1] - the new government caused all wares to disappear in the stores; there were queues for every possible trifle; Soviet currency was almost valueless; all acts committed by local people in the past, even of the most innocent nature, were ferreted out and brought to light if they had any relation with the Soviet government which had not existed on that territory at the time. A broad net of N. K. V. D. informers was spread out everywhere; all peace and quiet was shattered by arrests and the frequent occurrence of unexpected and senseless searches. Universal fear and suspicion soon became entrenched on the occupied territory. The local population, particularly the prosperous upper level and the intelligentsia, was very scornful in its relations with Soviet people, no matter who they were, although this feeling was hidden. 563 661 661

At this point it would be possible to terminate our description of Soviet reality on the eve of the Second World War. Only a few words more need to be said concerning the activity of the N. K. V. D. in this comparatively quiet period. It did not stop its arrests. People were always being snatched away, some because of the testimonies of prisoners arrested during the Exhovshchina, others for listening to foreign radio broadcasts. There was a purge among the workers and employees who had been brought to Minsk from Wilno together with a dismantled radio factory. /72/ Those in whose dossiers there was the slightest, most absurd, evidence from the agents were given particularly careful checkups as well as those who had already served some sentence in a concentration camp. 625 661

1 [In western Belorussia, annexed to Soviet Belorussia in 1939. Cf cat. 116, pp. 76-79 -- Analyst]

631 Art. 61. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies of regions, districts, cities or districts in big cities each elect a Chairman and a Secretary for the duration of their sessions to conduct the sittings of the sessions.

[623] Art. 62. The Chairman of a settlement or village Soviet convenes the Soviet and conducts its sittings.

Art. 63. The executive organs of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies are directly accountable both to the Soviets of Working People's Deputies which elected them and to the executive organs of the respective superior Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 64. The superior Executive Committees of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies have the right to annul decisions and orders of inferior Executive Committees and to suspend decisions and orders of inferior Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 65. The superior Soviets of Working People's Deputies have the right to annul decisions and orders of inferior Soviets of Working People's Deputies and of their Executive Committees.

634 Art. 66. The regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies set up the following Departments and Administrations of their Executive Committees:

- a Department of Agriculture
- a Department of Finance
- a Department of Trade
- a Department of Public Health
- a Department of Public Education
- a Department of Local Industry
- a Department of Municipal Economy
- a Department of Social Maintenance
- a Department of Motor Transport
- a Department of Local Fuel Industry
- a Department of Roads
- a General Department
- a Department of Arts
- a Department of Village and Kolkhoz Building
- a Department of Cultural and Educational Institutions
- a Planning Commission
- a Cadres Sector

under the Chairman of the Chairman of the Executive Committee and, in addition, in accordance with the specific features of the economy of the Region, the regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies set up the following Departments, subject to confirmation by the Union-Republican Ministries of Light Industry, Food Industry, Timber Industry and State Farms:

- a Department of Light Industry
- a Department of Food Industry
- a Department of Timber Industry
- a Department of State Farms.

[625] Art. 67. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of Justice of the Union set up their own administrations under the regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies, in accordance with the conditions of the region and on the basis of the laws of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.